

8100 PROCEDURE 400

Flight Following

(No.53 June 2015)

(See Policy 8362.2.2 - Flight Following)

(See HB 8100p406 – Aircraft Accident or Incident (Including Overdue and Missing))

Flight following is necessary to ensure pilot and passenger safety and shall be used for all tactical aircraft missions related to fire protection for aircraft owned by or contracted to CAL FIRE. Flight following may be accomplished using Automated Flight Following (AFF), Air Traffic Control (ATC) or verbal radio flight following.

Automated Flight Following (AFF) provides detailed and accurate aircraft location and flight history. With AFF, radio communications will be required upon departure, possibly during in-flight operations (i.e. divers, in-flight emergencies), and at completion of the flight. If the AFF system fails, flight following will revert to verbal radio flight following. In addition to AFF, CAL FIRE aircraft may utilize Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) flight following services.

AFF requires aircraft to be equipped with the necessary electronic hardware. The Command Centers (CC) and Air Attack Bases (AAB) are required to be equipped with a computer connected to the internet and access to the AFF program (<https://www.aff.gov>).

Command Centers will be responsible for the Flight Following of rotor wing aircraft (helicopters). Air Attack Bases shall be responsible for the flight following of fixed wing aircraft (Air Attack, Air Tankers, Aerial Supervision Module, Lead Plane).

In the absence of a staffed air attack base, fixed wing aircraft shall flight follow with a CC.

The CC/AAB responsible for flight following shall monitor AFF for the duration of the flight. However, all CCs and AABs shall routinely monitor AFF.

Responsibilities and Action

Pilot

1. Once airborne and in a position to communicate with the departure/sending CC/AAB, establish radio contact and relay the flight itinerary and ETA.
2. If there is a deviation from the planned and briefed flight route, contact the departure/sending CC/AAB via radio with the changed information.
3. Upon arrival:
 - a. Over an incident, notify the aerial supervisor or Incident Commander. In the absence thereof contact the Unit CC.
 - b. At the Destination/Receiving base contact the CC/AAB via radio or telephone within 10 minutes of landing.

Departure / Sending CC/AAB

1. The sending CC/AAB shall flight follow all tactical flights (verifying each 15 minutes) until the aircraft has reached the incident or destination AAB.
2. CC/AAB shall verify that the aircraft AFF signal is indicating a “positive” (yellow) or “negative” (black) icon on the AFF display and communicate the information to the pilot. For example: “(aircraft call sign) (positive/negative) AFF”. (i.e. “AA 330 Monte Vista, Positive AFF”).
3. CC/AAB shall relay flight information and AFF status via the region intercom to the Region CC and destination/receiving CC/AAB.
 - a. If the destination/receiving CC is in another Region, the departure/sending CC shall notify their Region OCC via the Intercom.
4. If AFF is “negative”:
 - a. Verbal radio flight-following shall be initiated by the departure/sending CC/AAB.
 - i. A “negative AFF” flight following procedure shall include relaying to the aircraft the frequency to be used for verbal radio flight following. The departure/sending CC/AAB shall document “verbal flight following” information in the system of record.
 - b. The pilot may, at their option, contact the appropriate Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Traffic Control (ATC) facility and request VFR (Visual Flight Rules) Flight Following
 - ii. Once Flight Following is established with ATC, the pilot shall contact the departure CC/AAB to advise them that they are Flight Following with ATC and terminate Flight Following with the CC/AAB.
5. If while flight following, the aircraft icon turns red on the AFF display, it means the signal has been lost. Immediately attempt contact with the aircraft via radio and verify status. If unable to make contact, immediately follow [HB 8100p406 – Aircraft Accident or Incident \(Including Overdue and Missing\)](#). If radio contact is made after a lost AFF signal, continue using verbal radio flight following procedures.

Note: While at an incident, during operations below 500’, a periodic red icon is normal and does not necessitate an ‘immediate’ contact especially if flight following has been established with the incident. A helicopter shutting down at a location other than an airport or helibase will cause the icon to turn red.

Destination / Receiving CC/AAB

1. When an aircraft arrives at the destination/receiving base, the destination/receiving CC/AAB shall advise the Region CC and sending/departure CC/AAB via intercom that the aircraft is on base.

- a. If the sending/departure CC/AAB is in another Region, the destination/receiving CC/AAB shall notify their Region OCC via the Intercom.
2. The receiving CC/AAB shall record appropriate flight information in the “system of record.

Region CC

1. When an aircraft is flying between Regions
 - a. The Region CC shall relay the information between the sending and receiving Unit CC/AAB.
2. The Region OCC should back up the Unit CC/AAB by monitoring aircraft in the Region using AFF.
 - a. If there is high incident activity; a Region CC may assume Flight Following responsibilities for the affected CC/AAB.
 - b. The Region OCC shall contact Unit CC/AAB if the status of an aircraft unexpectedly changes on AFF.
3. Region CC shall monitor CAL FIRE aircraft operating outside of California.

Any CC/AAB

1. If there is an in-flight emergency, the pilot shall declare MAYDAY. All radio traffic shall cease on the affected frequency until pilot states their intentions and receives appropriate assistance.
2. Failure to make verbal contact within 15 minutes of ETA
 - a. If aircraft fails to verbally contact the Destination/Receiving CC/AAB within 15 minutes of the ETA, review the AFF program for aircraft location and status, attempt to contact the aircraft on “Air Guard” (radio “emergency hailing channel”). Also, place a telephone call to the Destination/Receiving airport and request a "ramp check" to determine if the aircraft has landed but not checked in.
 - If contact is not made after following the procedures outlined, follow [HB 8100p406 – Aircraft Accident or Incident \(Including Overdue and Missing\)](#) for an aircraft accident.

[\(Next Procedure\)](#)

[\(Handbook Table of Contents\)](#)

[\(Forms and Form Samples\)](#)